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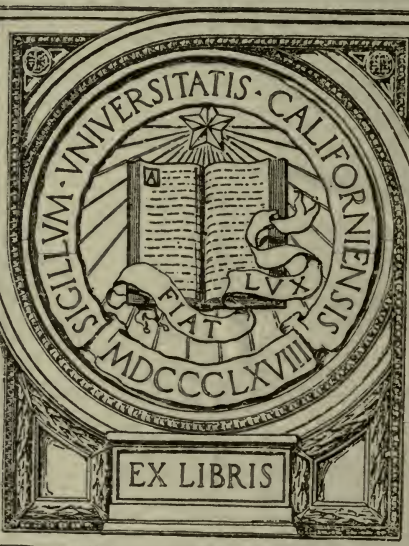
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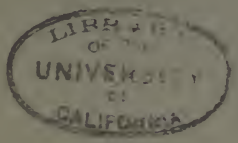
The Work of Benjamin Hale

by

Andrew D. White, LL.D. (Yale, Johns Hopkins and Hobart) D.C.L. (Oxon)



An address delivered at the unveiling of the monument to Dr. Hale, at the Annual Commencement of Hobart College, June 15th, 1911.

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THE WORK OF BENJAMIN HALE

A Paper read at the unveiling of a monument to President Hale in Coxe Hall, Hobart College, before the assembly of the Alumni at the Annual Commencement, June 15, 1911.

By Andrew Dickson White, LL.D.

(Yale, Johns Hopkins and Hobart), D. C. L. (Oxon.)

Sixty-two academic years have passed since, as a boy entering college, I first saw him whom we now especially commemorate. It was to him a happy day. The class of 1849, then graduating, contained a little brood of scholars of which any university might be proud—two of them destined to high rank in the Episcopate. As he handed them their diplomas from his Presidential chair in the nave of Trinity Church his bent form became more erect, his eye brighter, his voice even more than usually clear: the toil, the struggles, the disappointments were evidently forgotten. It was his hour of triumph. He had come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Nine academic years later I saw him for the last time. *Quantum mutatus ab illo.* The cares, the labors had told heavily upon him! The end of his work had come. Supported on the arm of one very dear to him he for a few moments entered the hall where were assembled, for their *Encaenia*, graduates he had known during his presidency of more than twenty years; there he heard the words of those appointed to place in his hands a tribute of affection and respect and he made brief but loving answer. It was the last public utterance of one whose voice had been heard with power for right reason in so many assemblies and to such noble purpose. The rest was silence. By the seaside which he loved so well there was a brief stay; loving hands made those last days especially happy;—and we saw his face no more.

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And now as to the man and his work. His forefathers were of hardy, sturdy New England stock, of settlers who came over in early Puritan times. From his childhood he was docile, kindly, open minded, interested in all worthy things about him, bright, alert, effective. He had a pious mother. He had good teachers, one or two of them especially suggestive, and he profited well by their instruction—studying faithfully and reading wisely. In his eighteenth year he entered Dartmouth College, did well there, and drew attention by his intellectual clearness and strength. The religious influences about him were powerful, and although, later, the beliefs which he had inherited were greatly modified, he always spoke with love and respect of those who counselled him in that earlier religious development.

The harsh climate of the New Hampshire mountain region injuring him, he sought something more like his milder native air, and after this first year at Dartmouth he entered Bowdoin. It was a smaller college than that which he had left and it lacked certain strong men whose influence in the college atmosphere he prized. In letters written late in life he mused over this change, and thought that his mind might have been more helpfully stimulated by such Dartmouth men of his time as Rufus Choate and James Marsh. But he found good men at Bowdoin also, was prompt to understand their value, and to profit by it, was a recognized leader in all worthy college activities, intellectual, moral, religious, and was graduated as the salutatorian of his class—the class of 1818.

He first sought employment as a village teacher, then became a student at Andover, and, next, a tutor in the Bowdoin faculty.

And now it was, in his twenty-fifth year, that he linked

his name with one of the greatest and most fruitful educational movements of the nineteenth century—one which is still exerting its power with increasing vigor. At the little neighboring town of Gardiner, in Maine, a public spirited member of the family after which the town was named had conceived ideas of bringing the physical sciences to bear upon various industries, and turned to the young Bowdoin tutor for advice and help. For this Mr. Hale was especially fitted. Although he had always done his classical work well, and, indeed, must have done it *exceedingly* well to earn his high place in the list of college honors, his main feeling throughout all those early years was evidently for the physical sciences. The fame of Silliman at Yale, then so renowned as a chemist, the direct influence of Parker Cleaveland at Bowdoin, then eminent as a mineralogist, and the movement in favor of natural science generally, then beginning throughout the country, evidently wrought greatly upon him. Into the organization of this new institution—known as the Gardiner Lyceum—the young tutor threw himself heartily and was appointed its Principal. So was established the first technical school, in any true sense of the word, ever founded in the United States. It was no mere makeshift, no mere manual labor school: as we look over the statements he then made of its purpose, the speeches which he made in its defense, the calls which he issued to students, the addresses which he made to his fellow citizens, and especially his appeals to the state legislature, we see that he had conceived, broadly in its scope and clearly in its details, the idea which has since bloomed forth in the technical schools, and indeed in the universities, which have assumed such large proportions in every part of this country, and, indeed, throughout the world.

A recent historian of education has declared that the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute was the first of all such schools on this continent. He is mistaken. Thanks to the authorities of Bowdoin College I have been able to read a series of printed documents, preserved in its library, including Mr. Hale's prospectus for the proposed technical school, his address as Principal at its opening, its first catalogue, and its curriculum, laid down by him, embracing two years of regular work, and a third year of added work, in all respects admirably stated, in view of the scientific development and industrial needs of that day. These show that the Gardiner Lyceum was incorporated in 1822 and was in operation early in 1823—with a goodly number of students, divided between a first year and second year. The Rensselaer Polytechnic School was not established until 1824. (See note at end of address.)

The young Principal impressed his views on others, and especially upon his coadjutor and friend, Mr. Gardiner. He also found supporters in the state legislature of Maine, and secured from them an appropriation for this new school. He was its main instructor, at times its *only* instructor, for those were the days when the whole range of sciences were thought to be within the powers of a single professor, and this young tutor seemed of that robust Baconian type which took all knowledge for its province. He soon drew other instructors to him, but he was the life of the whole, not only a chemist and physicist, mineralogist and mathematician, but a skillful draughtsman and, indeed, an architect. His first book was a treatise on practical carpentry. There is ample evidence that his work of four years at Gardiner was thoroughly good, but the times were not ripe for such an effort; the stupidity and stinginess of legislators could not be long overcome;

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legislative means of support were at last withdrawn, and the Gardiner Lyceum, the first coherent effort to carry out an adequate plan for bringing the physical sciences to bear upon the industries of this country, after doing good work during about ten years, faded from view. None the less, the place of that young college tutor in the history of education and of his country is secure; it is fixed—fully and irrevocably: the organizer of the first school for technical education in the United States, the precursor of that vast system which has spread with such effect through every state of the American Union, and far beyond it, was Benjamin Hale.

His personal success as a teacher is attested by the fact that, though the Gardiner Lyceum ended, his reputation increased. Even in those days when there would seem to have been but small means of spreading a scholarly fame, the good repute of his work had gone forth and he was elected to the professorship of chemistry and kindred branches at Dartmouth. That his work there was well done is amply proven. There were, indeed, discouragements: in spite of the growing interest of thinking men in the natural sciences they were not taken very seriously by the great body of students in those days. In the leading colleges practical training of undergraduates in laboratories had not been thought of. The only instruction save that given in text-book recitations was derived from lectures, and then and long afterward lectures upon natural science were largely considered rather a profitable sort of pastime than a means of either discipline or culture; but in spite of this difficulty he held his own during the eight years of his professorship thoroughly well and won the respect both of his colleagues and students.

Now came a time of trial for him. Just as in the early

days of Harvard Henry Dunster was driven forth from its presidency because, as Cotton Mather solemnly observed, he had "fallen into the briars of Anti-Pedobaptism," just as in recent days Dr. Woodrow was driven, for equally convincing reasons from a professorial chair nobly occupied, and Alexander Winchell similarly expelled from a university presidency for which he was admirably fitted, so Benjamin Hale fell under suspicion of dangerous opinions. He had come to believe in Episcopacy. There was nothing forbidding this belief in the charter or laws of Dartmouth College: on the contrary that institution claimed to be especially free from denominational trammels; but none the less the good men who bore sway there, in their fear of an Anglican invasion, were led to commit an offence that may be called, without exaggeration, an outrage. Secretly, under the pretense of economy, they abolished the professorship of chemistry, and without any form of preliminary notice, left Mr. Hale, with his wife and child, deprived of support; nor was this all: the publications afterward issued in behalf of the Trustees, while they were floundering in a stormy sea of public indignation, made their offence worse. Mr. Hale showed nobler characteristics. He wearied the public with no long arguments; he neither cringed nor threatened; he simply wrote a farewell letter stating the case as it was—a letter respectful and manly. Friends came to his side, especially one of his brother professors, and the result was that his reputation was increased—not only as a professor but as a man. He now turned from scientific work and employed his pen forcibly in the service of his religious ideas; his power as a preacher had also begun to be recognized and he was gladly heard in some of the foremost churches of New England. Academic recognition in the shape of a doctorate came

from Columbia College, and then it was, in 1836, that he was called to the presidency here, at Geneva.

The work thus assigned him was hard indeed. The College, though young, was encountering distrust and opposition. Men who should have supported it stood aloof. The endowment was next to nothing. The state was induced to give a very small subsidy, but this was ere long withdrawn and matters were worse than before. His labors now became heroic; as he afterward playfully said, he was president, secretary, treasurer, and, almost, the entire faculty. His small salary—at least that part of it which was paid—he shared with the tutors and professors whom he drew about him. But gradually, after many heart breaking disappointments, and after self sacrifice which approached the verge of martrydom, a better day seemed to dawn. His eloquent appeals secured aid. Most encouraging of all was it that he attracted into his classes many promising young men who felt his value and profited by it. First of all, he raised the reputation of the College for sound scholarship. It was recognized beyond the boundaries of the state: and well do I remember that when President Woolsey received me on my entrance at Yale, he expressed the hope that I might develop scholarship like that which Henry Hadley and Francis Hodges had recently brought from the college at Geneva.

Of Dr. Hale as a professor others must speak; during my one year in the College, I did not come into his classroom. But he greatly impressed me. As a preacher he spoke both to heart and mind. There was a simplicity and directness in his arguments, an aptness in his illustrations, a fairness, sanity and strength in his whole treatment of questions at issue which took strong hold of me.

Troublesome, indeed terrifying to many good men at

that time, were questions looming up between science and theology, but he was never thrown by them from his poise: he met these, as he met all questions, with candor and reasonableness. Vigorous as his style of argument was, there was nothing of the swashbuckler in his assertions or methods, and whatever concessions he made to science, he erected new fortresses for religion.

Nor did he reach his hearers through the pulpit alone. That was the bloom period of the popular lecture system, and I recall the pride which our little group of Geneva College men felt in him as he spoke lucidly and cogently to a large audience in the City Hall at Syracuse. I recall, too, his powers as a conversationist, at my father's table and elsewhere. On the æsthetic side, too, he exercised a happy influence. Pardon an additional reference to myself as showing how his winged words influenced young men. A short talk of his on Gothic Architecture, his text being photographs of York Cathedral as representing the English spirit, and the Church of St. Ouen as representing the French spirit, has influenced my thinking from that day to this. Connected with the impulse given by Ruskin's early writings read in my college room here, it inspired a passion which led me, during after years, to visit every cathedral and town hall of note from Trondhjem to Monreale, and from Dornoch and Durham to Seville.

Others, too, far more advanced in knowledge than myself, felt this happy influence, and I remember that Osborne Gordon, Ruskin's tutor, at Christ Church College, Oxford, spoke with especial satisfaction of his discussions with Dr. Hale. The foremost of the Hobart students of his time were those who most warmly acknowledged his influence, and of these were such as James Morrison Clarke, William Paret, Henry Adams Neely and Robert Hamilton. He

was, indeed, one of a body of strong men who did noble work throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. His was the type of Nott, Wayland, Mark Hopkins, Alonzo Potter, Andrew Peabody and Henry Philip Tappan —broad, robust men of thought and of affairs.

But I have already hinted at an additional quality of his, which I think none of these great contemporaries just named exhibited—a strong development on the æsthetic side. I remember recognizing his artistic hand in the little old wooden chapel of the College, and in his dwelling house opposite, and above all in yonder parish church, which, thanks largely to his counsels, remains a striking example of the beautiful in art wedded to the beautiful in nature.

In estimating his work we doubtless should call to mind the privations he suffered in the inability to carry out his most cherished ideas in the art which was to him greatest—architecture. It was his lot really to be a pioneer, and in the work which fell to him he found not opportunities for realizing his artistic ideals, but more frequently, rough encounters with those who misunderstood him, disappointments, distresses; yet he fought his way through these manfully, and lived to establish his work firmly. It was a life worth living—true, good, heroic, fruitful.

A cynic may ask "After all was a life so full of toils, disappointments and sacrifices worth living?" Benjamin Hale had to answer this question and he answered it rightly. He saw the present need and future possibilities of such colleges as this to which he gave himself. With his earlier work for education in applied science he may well have had faith also in the coming of great technical schools, and, indeed, of universities which the development of advancing studies in science, literature and the arts were

sure to demand and to create, but he knew that, first of all, there was a place, and that there must always be an increasing place, for the American college. What we see today proves that he was right; and the college will soon come to justify its existence even more fully than ever before. The time is coming, nay it now is, when there is need of a new division between the work of the colleges and that of the universities: a differentiation is becoming more and more urgent. May I, as one who has given much thought to university education, during more than fifty years, express my conviction that one of the greatest educational needs of these times is to stop the duplication of college work in the universities, to take from the universities the classes of the first two years and relegate them to the colleges, to receive into the universities, as a rule, only such as have taken Baccalaureate degrees in Arts, Science, or Literature, and to have university education concentrated upon the training of those who desire professional studies or advanced studies in science, literature and the arts? Some such division, in my opinion, ought to be made and will be made. It will give the colleges a great work which most naturally falls to them. It will enable the universities to concentrate their resources upon that further work which our country greatly needs and which should have its academic reward in special, advanced and professional degrees. It will give to the whole country men more excellently trained for the most advanced work, and with a great economy of time, money and effort. Benjamin Hale's writings as far back as 1822 and 1823 give ample proofs that he divined this double need of modern states and nations, and a differentiation such as I now advocate would be a noble development out of the work which he began so wisely at Gardiner, and which he finished so nobly here at Geneva.

You will remember, Alumni of Hobart, among the words which the world will not willingly let die, those which Pericles spoke over the heroes who were the first to fall in the Peloponnesian war. The whole world, he said, is the tomb of the hero, for throughout the world he is enshrined in the hearts of all great and good men. If that was true *then*, of the heroism of paganism and war, how much more true is it *now*, of the heroism of Christianity and peace. This prodigious extension of modern civilization over vast spaces, in which Hellas and the world known to Hellas was, geographically, but as a dot on the earth's surface; these miraculous powers, God-given to us through modern science, by which every deed well or ill done is instantly jotted down in the hearts and minds of hosts of men and women spread over the whole earth—to whom the hosts of Greece were, in numbers, but as a handful; that great idea to which our common Christianity has given so vast an impulse and development—the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God; all these conquests of the human mind and soul combine to enhance the value of such a life as this which we this day commemorate, and to make it a more and more precious addition to the treasures of humanity—enshrined in the hearts and minds of good and true men.

The work of Benjamin Hale in welding science with industry, in virtually re-founding this beautiful institution of learning, in giving scholarly inspiration and manly direction to over twenty generations of its graduates—an inspiration and direction passed on by them to other generations, and by these to others yet unborn, finds in the hearts and minds of all these—past, present, and to come—its greatest monument.

We do well indeed to place here this bust and its adornments. They form President Hale's well earned *memorial*, but we are to remember that this memorial is but a *part* of his *monument:* the monument for which he, himself, fought so bravely and wrought so well is Hobart College. In a larger sense than any memorial we can erect, the College is his monument. Let this memorial of his services, today unveiled, keep alive in all generous minds the determination to develop more and more nobly this College, and to make it the worthy visible sign and center of that greatest monument of all—the gratitude and affection in all hearts, far and near, which have, directly or by transmission, been quickened by his teachings and enriched by his example.

NOTE—For the claim made in behalf of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institution, see E. G. Dexter, "History of Education in the United States," p. 344.

Professor E. P. Cubberley, of Stanford University, in his excellent and most interesting "Syllabus of Lectures on the History of Education" (New York, 1904), in sketching out the history of the "Fellenberg Manual Labor movement" in Europe and America, classes the "Lyceum" at Gardiner, Maine, established in 1822–3, with the school at Lethe, Abbeville District, South Carolina, established in 1797. In so doing, while he is correct in making the Lethe institution primarily a manual labor school, that is, a school designed for enabling youth to support themselves upon a farm while obtaining an education, his statement is defective in so far as it leads to the conclusion that the Gardiner Lyceum had the same primary purpose. While there was, indeed, at Gardiner a prospect held out in some of the publications that opportunity would be afforded for young men to support themselves, in part at least, by their own labor, that was never the leading feature of the school and is hardly ever alluded to after the first statements regarding it, it being evidently subordinated completely to the main object, which was to bring studies in the various sciences, including mathematics, chemistry, physics, etc., etc., to bear upon the improvement of various arts and industries. This being the case, while the school at Lethe, established by De la Howe in 1797, may be one of the first, or perhaps the first, of the American "manual labor schools," the institution at Gardiner is, so far as can be ascertained, the first of the modern "technical schools," preceding the Rensselaer Polytechnic at Troy by between one and two years. See Cubberley, as above, p. 352; also the

Circulars of Information issued by the United States Bureau of Education, in 1888, No. 4, containing Meriwether, "The History of Higher Education in South Carolina," etc.

As to the school at Gardiner, see *The Centennial of Gardiner* (Gardiner, Maine, 1903), p. 38; also *An Address to the Public from the Trustees of the Gardiner Lyceum* (Hallowell, 1822); also *Catalogue of the Gardiner Lyceum and An Address of the Trustees* (Hallowell, Nov., 1823); also *An Inaugural Address Delivered at Gardiner, Me. Jan. 1, 1823. By Benjamin Hale, Principal of the Gardiner Lyceum and Lecturer on Natural Philosophy*, (Hallowell, 1823). Beside these, there is in the Bowdoin College Library, a *Report of the Committee on Literary Institutions* [of the Maine Senate] *on the Petition of the Trustees of Gardiner Lyceum, February 25, 1832*, (Augusta, 1832), which shows that there was attached to the school "a workshop with circular saws, moved by water power, free of charge to the students, and fitted up for their use," and also a collection of philosophical apparatus, books, models, minerals, specimens in natural history, etc., with fourteen acres of land given to the institution for use by students in agriculture, with substantial buildings. The number of students, beginning with about twenty, rose to over sixty, and the institution existed for ten years, when the withdrawal of the legislative appropriation led to its discontinuance.

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